



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

USDA's Cultural Transformation Action Items

- LEADERSHIP
- RECRUITMENT & RETENTION
- TALENT MANAGEMENT
- EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT
- CUSTOMER FOCUS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

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MyUSDA

A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

Volume 5, Issue 6

May 2015

USDA Employees Encouraged to Complete 2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS)

By Dr. Karlease Kelly, USDA Virtual University

The 2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey launched the week of May 4th. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) emailed the survey to tens of thousands of employees, including many at USDA. Currently, our response rate is 42.1%. Our goal is to reach a 70% participation rate. You can identify the email message from OPM by the subject, "2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey." The survey link is unique for each employee who receives the survey, so it cannot be shared with others. The survey will close on Friday, June 12th. If you were randomly selected by OPM to receive the survey, please take the time to respond and share your input about the progress we have made and how we can continue to improve.

Secretary Vilsack Marks Public Service Recognition Week

USDA Secretary Thomas Vilsack shared a message during Public Service Recognition Week that was noted in a recent *Federal Times* story. In this article, he discussed the reason that he serves the public, and he highlighted the great work done at USDA. The Secretary's full remarks can be found [at this link](#). A portion of the Secretary's remarks are printed below

"As Secretary of Agriculture, I am inspired to serve because of the people I've met during my more than six years of service who have been positively impacted by U.S. Department of Agriculture programs and staff. There are people like the families living in rural Putnam and White counties in Tennessee. Until recently, they had to haul water in jugs from individual wells because they did not have running water.

"Thanks to USDA employees, the communities were able to get a grant that allowed the small town of Monterey, Tennessee, to extend its municipal water supply five miles beyond town limits and bring potable water to its neighbors. Shannon Davis, a local resident who had hand-hauled water into her home for 15 years, told local USDA staff that 'there are not enough adjectives to express how much getting public water means to my family. The smell of fresh water is wonderful.'"

Printed by courtesy of the Federal Times.



You can contact MyUSDA by emailing MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov, and be sure to visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Website](#).

RD Uses 2014 FEVS Data to Guide Cultural Transformation

By Daniel Alvarado, RD

Even as Federal employees respond to the 2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, USDA employees are utilizing the 2014 FEVS results to increase employee engagement and further the Secretary's Cultural Transformation (CT) initiative.



Scottsbluff, NE, field office employees review FEVS information with Joan Scheel (second from right.)



Kearney, NE, field office staff connected via video teleconference with other field office staff.



The USDA Rural Development (RD) state office in Lincoln, Nebraska, kicked off its statewide CT efforts with Deputy Under Secretary Patrice Kunesh.

Employees took part in focus groups designed to utilize information gathered from last year's FEVS. That input from USDA respondents served as an important starting point for improving employee engagement.

An in-house data analysis of the Nebraska state FEVS results spanning a three year period was prepared by Pathways full-time Marketing and Outreach Intern Daniel Alvarado.

Business Programs Director Joan Scheel led a team including Senior Human Resources Specialist Sandra Gause, utilizing the data analysis as a starting point for discussions.

Scheel, the newest program director in the state, relied on her seven years of experience as a staff member in the state office and presented information shared with the staff and the leadership in separate meetings.

To further encourage employees to participate, Scheel also emphasized the importance of employee confidentiality during the sessions.

On May 4, 2015, the Nebraska CT team journeyed across the state, traversing more than 800 miles in three days, conducting CT focus groups and gathering feedback.

Employees working in field offices where a focus group could not be conducted in person were able to join the session by telephone or by video teleconference. Scheel recently presented her findings to the leadership team, which began work to finalize an action plan.

North Platte, NE, field office staff participate in an employee focus group on FEVS and employee engagement.

FSA Trainings Focus on Employee Engagement

By John Blanchard, FSA

Leaders at the Farm Service Agency (FSA) are making workforce engagement and cultural transformation key priorities.

Mark Rucker, FSA's Deputy Administrator for Management (DAM) has created Quarterly Supervisor trainings to encourage knowledge-sharing, leadership development, collaboration and transparency. FSA held the first of the trainings recently including leaders from Kansas City and Washington, DC (who participated remotely), setting a solid foundation for future success. The DAM gave leaders in both locations the opportunity to preview the "Start with Why" video, a management philosophy created by Simon Sinek focused on discovering the purpose, cause or belief that inspires you to do what you do.

To bolster workforce engagement in FY15, the DAM is focused on strengthening communications, training and accountability. Another goal is to emphasize strategic planning, reward and recognition programs, and work-life balance initiatives. Division Directors shared their diverse personal experiences and leadership philosophies.

As an outcome of this training, Manager Leaders were asked to gather feedback from their employees to create a new vision statement that reflects their beliefs around providing exceptional customer service and working in a culture that values diversity, integrity and growth.

In order to foster a collaborative, team building environment, we have created an opportunity for employees to take personal ownership.

Focus on Ethics

**Beware of E-mails Offering "Thank You" Cash Gift Cards:
While that vendor-offered gift card may appear harmless, it can lead to trouble!**

By Stuart Bender, Director, USDA Office of Ethics

Did you know it is illegal for Federal employees to accept a cash gift card from a vendor as a "thank you" for doing your job? Every day Federal employees receive tempting e-mails from vendors seeking to obtain business from the government. One powerful way a contractor can grab attention is to target Federal employees with e-mails offering \$20 or \$50 cash gift cards as a "thank you" for merely viewing the vendor's on-line product demo webinar or completing a survey.

While these vendor-offered gift cards may appear harmless -- after all they are described as a "thank you" for your time -- the result can spell real trouble for the unwary employee. That enticing gift offer can result in a potential criminal investigation and could also potentially expose your computer and the USDA shared computer network system to the risk of a computer virus or malware.



To learn how you can be savvy and avoid this trap, read on.

Accepting money from an outside source violates the strict ban against employees accepting outside supplementation of Federal salary for performing official duties. The restriction is rooted in Federal criminal statute at 18 U.S.C. § 209. The rationale behind the ban is that the public could view the procurement process as being unfair if employees favor vendors offering gifts. To prevent any erosion of the public's confidence in the integrity of government decision-making, the law bars employees from accepting any supplementation of their government salary from a private company. In addition, other Federal criminal statutes may also be implicated, such as the ban on accepting bribes in 18 U.S.C § 201 and the conflict of interest statute at 18 U.S.C. § 208.

Despite clear ethics prohibitions, many vendors still offer cash gift cards to unsuspecting Federal employees. As a recent example, some USDA employees received an invitation, sent to their USDA e-mail accounts, offering an opportunity to view a brief presentation on the vendor's IT services. The invitation highlighted a \$50 Amazon gift card offered as a "thank you" for the employee's time. If you receive such an e-mail, hitting the "delete" key is your best move.

Achieving Cultural Transformation Through USDA's Blueprint for Stronger Service

By Susan Siemietkowski, FNCS

When employees hear the term "Cultural Transformation" (CT), they typically think of special emphasis programs and other efforts to promote diversity. It's true that such endeavors are an important part of CT.

However, training and talent management, which empower employees to reach their full potential and create a higher performing organization, is at the foundation of the CT's action items. Along these lines, the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Service's (FNCS) Contracts Division deserves a CT spotlight.



Efficiency
Straight Ahead

Last year, the division achieved a cost savings of nearly \$11 million and demonstrated an estimated \$3.2 million in cost avoidance, for an overall total savings of \$14 million. The Contracts Division also exceeded 90% of USDA's individual set-aside goals, with an overall small business achievement of 49%.

These noteworthy outcomes are consistent with Secretary Vilsack's Blueprint for Stronger Service, which directs USDA agencies to take steps to cut costs and modernize operations. The success at FNCS is a great example of how USDA continues to take proactive steps to reduce spending, streamline operations, and cut costs. Overall, USDA's efforts have saved taxpayers \$1.4 Billion in recent years.



AMS Employee Leads USDA Diversity Forum

By Becky Unkenholz, AMS

On May 4, Dairy Program Marketing Specialist Edwin Yong with the Agricultural Marketing Service (currently on detail to USDA's Office of Human Resources Management) led a half-day USDA forum prior to the 2015 Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) National Leadership Program. The forum included training on LGBT issues and conflict management and a career panel discussion by various USDA leaders, including David Jamison, the Dairy Program's Operations and Accountability Division Director. More than 40 USDA employees attended the forum.

Dairy Program Marketing Specialist Edwin Yong (back left) and family meet with Marketing and Regulatory Programs Under Secretary Ed Avalos (back right) at the 2015 Federal Asian Pacific American Council meeting.



UPCOMING USDA SPECIAL OBSERVANCES

Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Pride Month

Date: Thursday, June 4, 2015

Caribbean - American Heritage Month

Date: Thursday, June 18, 2015

The observances begin at 10:00 a.m. (EDT) at the Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC. Employees receive one hour of diversity training for attending USDA Special Observances.

Children Learn All About USDA at Annual Event

By Debra Arnold, OHRM

The Jamie L. Whitten Patio of the USDA Headquarters rocked with more than 1000 children, parents and exhibitors during the recent annual Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day.

Agencies pulled out all the stops to make this day a grand experience for not only USDA children, but local community children as well. USDA partnered with the White House on an initiative to help our Nation's youth to enter the workforce by opening our doors to local children who might not otherwise have an opportunity to attend such an event. A local YMCA group was sponsored by National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and the Office of the Secretary hosted children from Eliot-Hine Middle School (see photos below).

More than 30 exhibitors were onsite representing the agencies of USDA to teach all our youth about the great works of USDA (see left photo below). The children were greeted by Woodsy Owl (see middle pic below) and Milkshake, the Agricultural Marketing Service dairy cow. The Office of Civil Rights used M&Ms to teach about diversity, and NASS statisticians held a jelly bean counting contest. The children learned about pests, wildlife, wheat grinding, gardening, sustaining 'Mother Earth' and much, much more!!!



To learn more about our Bring Your Daughter and Son to Work Day and other Work/Life and Wellness Programs, send emails to wellness@dm.usda.gov.



June is National Employee Wellness Month

By Debra Arnold, OHRM

USDA recognizes the need to maintain a healthy, happy workforce. In observance of June as National Employee Wellness Month, USDA will host several events targeting work/life balance through financial seminars, stress reduction, health screenings, nutrition and fitness. Here is what's coming:

- June 4th (11:00am-1:00pm) – Fitness Day! Includes Open House in the South Building Fitness Center with snacks, tours, fee waiver to join and FREE classes. Hosted by Teresa Knoll, Departmental Management
- June 11th (1:30pm-2:30pm) – Financial Wellbeing! Benefits Seminar Part I in Room 107-A of the Whitten Building hosted by Michael Feeley of 'About Federal Benefits'.
- June 18th (11:00am-12:00pm) – Financial Wellbeing! Benefits Seminar Part II in Room 107-A of the Whitten Building hosted by Winter Troxel of 'About Federal Benefits'.
- June 18th (1:15pm-1:45pm) – Stress Free Hour! Yoga Nidra session in the South Building Fitness Center hosted by our own Karen Malkin, FSA.
- June 23rd (11:00am-1:00pm) – Health Awareness! Blood pressure monitoring, one-on-one health coaching and resources available. Hosted by Office of Operations Health Units.
- June 25th (11:00am-1:00pm) – Nutrition Day! Rachel Griffin, I. L. Creations our Food Service Contractor will have a dietician on site for counseling, samples and serving of a nutrition meal and a nutrition education activity/game.

All events are on a first-come/first-served basis. For more information regarding any of the events planned, send emails to wellness@dm.usda.gov.

USDA Holds 2nd Annual Employee Resources Day

By Tatjana Fernandez, OHRM

On April 16, 2015, USDA employees had an opportunity to connect with over 31 organizations at the Department's second annual Employee Resources Day (ERD).

The participating employee [associations](#) and [professional](#) resources groups took advantage of the opportunity to connect with over 800 employees during the event.

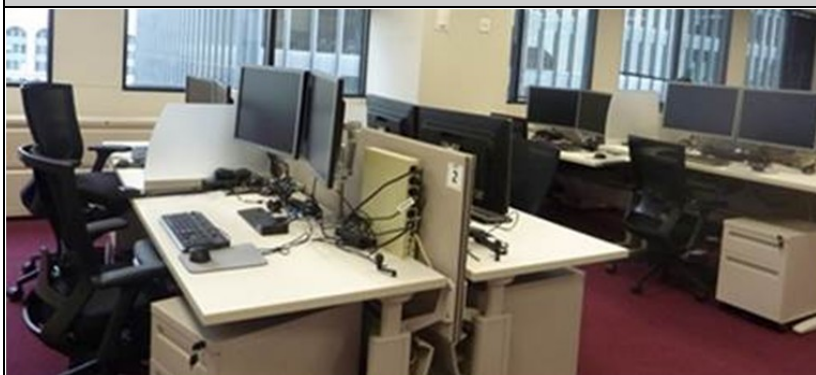
The "Get Connected" event not only drew people from Washington, DC, but also from Beltsville, Riverdale, and Alexandria, VA.

The event sponsors are from the Diversity, Recruitment, Work/Life and Wellness Division in the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM). They are looking forward to bringing employees and employee resources groups together for yet another successful event in 2016.



Food and Nutrition Service Midwest Regional Office Supports Workplace Flexibility

By Susan Siemietkowski, FNS



"Hoteling" and desk sharing, office concepts growing in popularity around the country and within USDA specifically, were recently adopted in the Midwest Regional Office (MWRO) of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service in Chicago.

MWRO successfully introduced and implemented different space options in order to accommodate new staff members. As a result, MWRO maximized the use of existing, under-utilized space and avoided additional lease and equipment costs.



Employees were offered the choice to hotel, desk-share (pictured top left), or change work schedules in order to meet the criteria for a permanently assigned cubicle. Work supplies and equipment are stored in new storage cabinets (pictured bottom left.) Hoteling staff reserve their space via the office's Intranet. Feedback from employees has been positive.

If you'd like to share your feedback about Cultural Transformation, telework, diversity, or any other aspect of work/life at USDA, send an email to: MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to [USDA Connections](#).



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If you have ideas for future articles, contact us at MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov

Submit Your Article to MyUSDA

The monthly deadline for submissions is the end of the first week of each month.

Guidance on Submissions to MyUSDA

Submissions to MyUSDA should indicate progress that you, your agency, or your mission area have achieved toward implementing some aspect of the Secretary's Cultural Transformation (CT) Initiative. The ideal submission includes photos or graphics along with a brief description of the event. The ideal word count for articles is 150-200. All submissions are subject to editing and Departmental review.

Submissions may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline, a first-person account, or any work-related activity, event, or observance demonstrating the Secretary's Cultural Transformation Action Items: Leadership; Recruitment & Retention; Talent Management; Employee Development; and, Customer Focus & Community Outreach.

Email submissions or further inquiries to MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov.